DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 471 PS 023 368

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TITLE Schooling for the Middle Years: Developments in Eight European Countries.
INSTITUTION Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Dec 94
NOTE 54p.; Paper presented at the "Frontiers in the Education of Adolescents" Conference (Marbach, Germany, November 3-5, 1994).
AVAILABLE FROM Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 2400 N Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20037.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cross Cultural Studies; *Curriculum; Educational Administration; Educational Opportunities; Educational Planning; *Educational Policy; Equal Education; Foreign Countries; *Government Role; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; Parent School Relationship; *School Administration; School Guidance; Specialization; State Government; *Teaching Methods; Track System (Education)
IDENTIFIERS Czech Republic; Denmark; England; France; Germany; Italy; Netherlands; Switzerland

ABSTRACT

This booklet describes how eight European countries structure educational provision for children in the middle years of schooling, ages 10 through 14. The booklet discusses the status of middle years education, the tracking of students, equal opportunities for minorities, specialization of teachers and counselors, academic versus holistic education, and the school as a community of learning in the context of developments in several European countries and in the United states. Individual sections on the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, France, Italy, and The Netherlands describe the structure of middle years schooling, curriculum, teaching, guidance, transition, school administration, and contact with families. A separate section on developments in Germany and Switzerland focuses on middle years education in general in these two countries and specifically on the systems in place in the German state of Saxony and the Swiss canton of Valais. (MDM)

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SCHOOLING FOR THE MIDDLE YEARS

Developments In Eight European Countries

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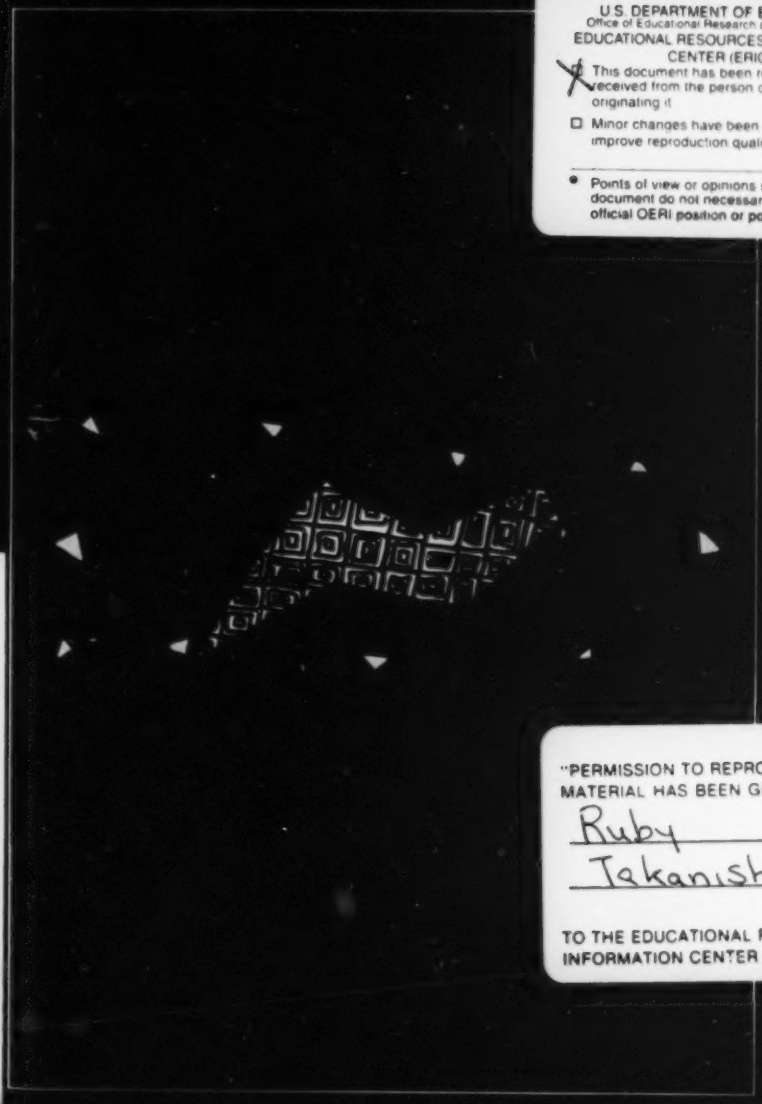

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SCHOOLING FOR THE MIDDLE YEARS

Developments In Eight European Countries

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Independent Consultant, London

CARNEGIE COUNCIL ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK

DECEMBER 1994

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FOREWORD

This paper was prepared at the request of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development for the conference "Frontiers in the Education of Adolescents." The conference is a joint initiative of Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Johann Jacobs Foundation and took place in Marbach, Germany, from November 3–5, 1994.

The paper is intended to give a background understanding of how various European countries structure educational provision for children in the "middle years" of schooling. The "middle years" are here defined as approximately ages 10 to 14. Coverage varies, however, in each country according to the level of schooling, around this age, that best approximates to a middle phase. This paper discusses how school systems address, or fail to address, special needs of young adolescents, in particular of the kind identified in the American context by the Carnegie Council's report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century.* This discussion of school systems is not a survey of the social and psychological development of young adolescents in the countries covered, but sets the scene by identifying the educational structures and policies that influence the school experiences of children in this age group.

A common framework is used to discuss developments in six countries in which the national government is the most important decisionmaker in educational policymaking: the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, France, Italy, and the Netherlands. The final section looks more selectively at similar developments in two federal countries — Germany and Switzerland — where the most important decisions are made at a subnational level.

I am indebted to the following individuals for supplying country information that contributed to this paper: Alena Spejchalová (Czech Republic), Birte Kjaer Jensen (Denmark), Kimberly Cardinale (France), Andreas Lindner (Germany), Alessandro Cavalli (Italy), Paul van Oijen (Netherlands), and Eogen Stocker (Switzerland). All interpretations and judgments, however, are my responsibility.

D. H.
London

KEY ISSUES

In 1989, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development published a report, *Turning Points:Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, demonstrating that schools attended by most young American adolescents were strikingly out of phase with the developmental, social, and academic needs of their students. The report advocated measures that would make schools into more sensitive "communities for learning," with a stable core of academic programs, measures to ensure success for all students, links with communities, and a focus on the specific problems of adolescents.

In many European countries, schooling in the middle years is similarly seen as a weak link in the education system. Although the reasons are not always the same as those cited in the United States, there is much overlap. Most notably, the lack of a specific philosophy of education for the middle years has created difficulties, in particular for weaker students making the transfer from a protected elementary school to the "jungle" of the secondary school. At the center of this problem in Europe is the tendency to base middle grade education on the transmission of core knowledge considered necessary before entering senior high school, and in so doing to focus insufficiently on the personal, social, and intellectual development of individuals aged about 12 or 13.

Europeans, like Americans, have started to grapple with this situation, even if an ideal solution seems elusive. An important difference between the United States and most of the countries examined in this paper is the ability of the latter to change edu-

cational structures systematically from the national level. So while the movement to reform middle-grade education in the United States has been a bottom-up approach (albeit with strong leadership from the state level), the recent introduction, for example, of a core curriculum in the Netherlands, of a more humanized pedagogy in the Czech Republic, and of greater help for students in difficulty in France have all been legislated from the center. Even in Germany and Switzerland, both federal countries, states tend to legislate the content and structure of schooling in greater detail than their American counterparts.

The country sections that follow focus on efforts at the system level to address specifically the needs of the middle years (approximately ages 10 to 14), and on where these efforts fall short. Although a child's development is shaped by specific experiences with teachers, friends, and family rather than predetermined by an educational system, the structures and policies described below set the context in which school experiences take place.

Every country's situation is different, yet a striking number of common issues and sometimes common approaches arise from the national descriptions that follow. The remainder of this section briefly reviews some of the main issues that have arisen in European countries, and ends with a tentative conclusion.

The status of the middle years: Extension of elementary, preparation for secondary, or a stage in its own right?

ISSUE 1

IN SCANDINAVIA, THE TERM "PRIMARY (or basic) education" is applied to the first nine years of schooling; in Denmark, most children have the same class teacher from age 7 to age 16. In most other Western European countries, children make a sharp break into secondary education some time between the ages of 10 and 12, and lower-secondary schooling takes place under the heavy shadow of upper-secondary.

No country has come to formulate the education of children in the middle years mainly in terms of

their own specific needs and characteristics. The example of France, which has made an effort to do so with a specific school for 11- to 15-year-olds (the *collège*), illustrates why not. The style of this institution has been strongly influenced by the competition to enter a prestigious upper-secondary school (the *lycée*); the teaching practices and curriculum of the *collège* mimic those of the academic *lycée*. Conversely, the Scandinavian schools could be accused of being influenced excessively by the elementary school style, cocooning pupils in too protected an environment. There have been repeated concerns about children unused to the more competitive atmosphere of secondary school finding it hard to cope when they graduate to that level aged 16.

In many respects, measures to introduce practices appropriate to the middle years stand more chance of succeeding in a predominantly "primary" than in a predominantly "secondary" environment. Denmark has lengthened the period in which children prepare to make choices at age 16, to three years; Sweden has increased testing in the middle years. Perhaps the biggest potential problem is the subject competence of teachers in the "primary" model, with less specialized teachers. Reservations about middle schools in England are centred around doubts that they can provide specialized instruction of the same quality as in secondary schools. This may create a trade-off requiring a decision about educational priorities: is it more important for a 13-year-old to be in a secure and friendly environment, or to maximize the academic quality of his or her instruction?

ISSUE 2

Together or separate: Should the middle years be a common experience, or adapted to different needs?

UNLIKE THE UNITED STATES, MOST EUROPEAN countries either separate children by ability sometime in the middle years or have done so in the relatively recent past. Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands still divide pupils into separate tracks at the end of primary school; these countries are starting to see the need to lengthen the period of common education.* But countries such as France,

▲ 6

Italy, the Czech Republic, and Denmark that have abolished selection in favor of a completely common education in the middle years, are starting to wonder whether they might have taken uniformity too far. The problem is that at the end of the lower-secondary cycle, pupils still have to make important choices about multiple senior high school options. Where everybody has studied an identical curriculum, it can be hard for pupils to make a sudden decision about specialization. There are thus cautious moves in these countries to reintroduce an optional element into lower-secondary schooling.

This situation highlights the problem of two competing demands on schooling in the middle years: on one hand, it must offer a curriculum that is appropriate to the developmental and learning needs of the young adolescent; on the other, it needs to "orient" pupils towards a future phase of learning. Orientation—the preparation of pupils for a future choice of learning track—is a prominent theme in debates about European middle-grade education because of the importance of making the right choices at senior high-school level. But it is also widely considered important for all children in the middle grades to round off their general, "basic" education effectively, rather than unduly anticipating the tracking that follows.

* In this paper, "tracking" is used in its American sense of dividing pupils by ability, whether into different schools or into groups within schools. In Britain, "streaming" is used to describe the practice of dividing pupils into different classes based on ability.

Equal success or equal opportunity to fail? ISSUE 3

ALTHOUGH THE TERM "OPPORTUNITY TO learn" is not generally used in Europe, concern over disadvantaged groups' ability to cope with the curriculum in the middle years mirrors this issue as it has been formulated in the United States. In Europe the concern is not just with the growth of certain social phenomena that add to these difficulties (e.g., immigration, drug cultures), but also with the

unpreparedness for a rigorous secondary school curriculum of a section of the population that has not hitherto been expected to cope with it. This causes failure as much in Germany where more pupils are attempting the élite strands of a still-divided secondary school system as in France where the least able children find it hard to keep up with an academic-style common curriculum in a single school. In both cases the failure does not typically lead to early dropout like in the United States, but rather to repetition of grades, growing demoralization, disaffection with the system, and ultimately, failure through dropout at a later academic level.

The common curriculum represents a well-founded attempt to raise all students towards the higher educational levels that are needed in modern society and work. But this will only be translated into a common opportunity to learn if attention is given to helping the large number of students who face both intellectual and social difficulties that threaten their ability to keep up. France has accepted that pupils leaving elementary school are not always fully prepared for a formal secondary curriculum, and plans to concentrate in the first lower-secondary year on identifying what pupils have learned and giving them individual help with any difficulties.

Cultural and linguistic diversity complicates this issue in most of Western Europe, which has become far more ethnically mixed due to recent immigration. There is not room in this paper to deal with the many and complex issues related to educating a multiethnic population — issues that are not confined to the middle years. But one problem that has arisen in several European countries, of particular relevance to early secondary education, is worth noting.

Special classes for linguistic and cultural minorities, if unaccompanied by efforts to make mainstream education more "multicultural" in approach, risk marginalizing the groups targeted for help. In France and Germany, genuine efforts have been made to assist educationally the large numbers of recent immigrants, but conservative, monocultural approaches to curriculum content remain relatively intact. In Scandinavia, tolerance and understanding has allowed resources to flow into mother-tongue

tuition (especially in Sweden), but this has sometimes helped sustain ghettoes.

It is in early secondary education that exclusion from the mainstream starts to become a systematic and often irreversible disadvantage. This can be seen most clearly in the Netherlands, where despite a genuine commitment to intercultural education (a compulsory component of initial teacher training in the Netherlands since 1984 existing nowhere else in Europe), 12-year-olds of foreign origin are assigned overwhelmingly to the lowest academic track, which is often a dead end. In Britain, the creation of a more genuinely multicultural mainstream is at least an aspiration in the dominant professional ideology, although still far from a reality. Perhaps ironically, after the limited success of "native" multiculturalism (e.g., the Welsh in Britain, the Alsatians in France) in the 1970s, and of "immigrant" multiculturalism in the 1980s, it is another force that in the 1990s might have the best chance of making national curricula less monocultural: the pluralism of European integration.

The organization of teaching and counseling: Qualified specialists or caring generalists?

ISSUE 4

IT IS A COMMON EXPERIENCE TO CHILDREN in most European countries to switch from having a single class teacher in elementary school to having a different teacher for each subject in secondary school. In Denmark, the outstanding exception, specialized teaching builds up progressively over the years. Another country where the switch is less sudden is Italy, where even elementary schools are abandoning the practice of the single class teacher.

One aspect of European education that makes the switch to multiple teachers less harsh than it might otherwise be is the common curriculum. With every child studying the same subjects, a class of pupils is easily kept together and normally allocated a "home" teacher who interacts with the subject specialists about each child's progress. This often amounts in practice to what in the United States would be referred to as "team teaching."

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In many European countries, the concept of counseling or separate pastoral care plays a negligible role in the school system. Counseling is effectively deprofessionalized. It becomes the responsibility of either the class teacher or another teacher with special counseling responsibilities but not specific training as a counselor. One merit of relying on this form of advice is demonstrated by the unsatisfactory nature in England and France of overstretched professional services detached from schools. The experience of career and counseling interviews provided by such services is that they often fail to relate directly to any help the child may be getting at an everyday level in school. Thus a well-integrated, mainly teacher-based form of guidance would seem the ideal, as long as it succeeds in identifying student difficulties. The size, organization, and environment of the school may be a more important influence than the formal nature of pastoral duties. Certainly a Danish teacher in a small school with small classes who has been teaching the same pupil for nine years seems well-placed to identify and cope with problems as they arise.

ISSUE 5

Academic instruction or educating the whole person?

IN MANY COUNTRIES THE MIDDLE YEARS of schooling are a time when a number of new pressures and requirements arise simultaneously. Not only must the student get used to the increased rigors of secondary school, but the curriculum is generally fuller than at any other stage. Foreign languages, particular social and natural science disciplines, and subjects such as technology and computer studies, get added to the curriculum, and there is not yet an opportunity to specialize. At the same time, there is an evident need to raise the awareness of the young adolescent in less academic areas such as health, citizenship, and sex education. The pressures of adulthood are crowding in from every angle.

Several school systems have acknowledged the need for a better balance between academic instruction and the education of the whole person, but under pressure the former has a tendency to com-

mand more teaching effort than the latter. In England, teachers find it hard to do justice to the five "cross-curricular themes" such as health education when they have just acquired a ten-subject national curriculum for 11- to 14-year-olds with detailed attainment targets in each discipline. In the Netherlands, it took intensive parliamentary lobbying to get "social and life skills" into the lower-secondary curriculum — as the 15th compulsory subject with just three percent of teaching time.

In practice, the degree to which teaching heeds the development of the individual rather than merely imparting knowledge is likely to depend on the teaching philosophy applied to the mainstream subjects rather than the addition of "social" ones. Several countries, including the Netherlands and England, are trying to move towards the development of useful skills as well as subject knowledge throughout the curriculum. In the Czech Republic, there is a concerted attempt to move away from didactic teaching and to create syllabuses that emphasize human moral qualities, democratic co-existence, and values such as tolerance.

Can schools be made "communities for learning?" ISSUE 6

THE ENVIRONMENT OF A SCHOOL IS as much by national culture and local circumstance as by conscious policies to create a learning culture. Smaller schools in more tightly-knit communities start with a natural advantage. So do schools in countries where parents have a strong tradition of participating in school life, and where teachers feel valued and respected. But countries have also made specific attempts to encourage the creation of learning communities, for example:

▲ *Giving greater autonomy to school leaders.* This virtually universal trend in European countries can potentially enhance the sense of identity and mission of a school, although there is also a risk that in becoming a manager of resources the principal's important role as educational leader is diminished.

▲ *Encouraging contacts in schools that go beyond the single-subject specialist teaching a 50-minute lesson.* Cross-disciplinary work would seem a feasible option in the middle grades in European schools, where one group of children studies a common set of subjects. But curricula that define subject content and attainment targets in terms of the traditional disciplines can make multidisciplinary work less likely. England's adoption of a national curriculum appears to have checked a growing enthusiasm for projects crossing subject boundaries.

▲ *Creating new links with parents and others in the community beyond the school.* Many countries involve parents in formal advisory structures, but parental involvement on a day-to-day level seems a more important way of extending the educative mission of the school into the home. Most countries acknowledge the need for regular information for parents, but there are wide differences in terms of how readily outsiders are welcomed into classrooms. England and the Netherlands have a stronger tradition of involvement than France and Italy, where classrooms are still mainly regarded as places for professionals. In all countries there is a much greater involvement of parents at the elementary than at the secondary level, related partly to the more open timetable where there is a single, multi-disciplinary teacher. But conversely, involvement of businesses in school life is growing in particular at the upper-secondary level in European schools. Middle-grade schools could potentially fall between these two kinds of involvement, or alternatively could get involved in both of them.

A TENTATIVE CONCLUSION

THE VARIOUS ATTEMPTS TO REFORM THE middle grades of schooling in European countries have not managed to resolve a fundamental dilemma. If these grades base their style and programs too heavily on the "secondary" school model, they risk neglecting the particular needs of young adolescents and creating courses that discourage them from learning. If, on the other hand, there is a distinctive model for the middle grades, will students be able to cope adequately when they pass on to the next phase, for which they have received little preparation?

This dilemma can perhaps only be resolved if there is a genuine change in ideas about the purposes of schooling and the nature of scholastic achievement. Most European systems still measure and value school achievement largely in terms of passing examinations in "academic" subjects, usually at some time close to the end of secondary education. The needs of young adolescents may include preliminary preparation for this task, but also include the development of confidence, skills, and attributes that will help them to learn and to develop in a balanced way towards mature adulthood. These are attainments that are less easily certificated, and less consciously valued, but are often prerequisites for successful and productive learning beyond the middle years.

THE MIDDLE YEARS IN THE CZECH SCHOOL SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

Educational change is an important part of the current transformation of Czech society. Broadly, schools are trying to move away from a purely didactic and scientific approach to knowledge, and to pay greater attention to the development of the individual. This has particular relevance to children aged 10 to 15, undergoing the second of two cycles of basic or primary education, and preparing to qualify for admission to one of three types of upper-secondary school. On an experimental basis, this second cycle is being made more distinct from elementary education, situated in a separate insitution.

Under the old system, there was a tendency toward ideological indoctrination and the formal acquisition of knowledge, and a neglect of psychological and social aspects. The present trend is to humanize and democratize education, paying more attention to individuals and to interpersonal relations between teacher and pupil and between school and family. New syllabuses are designed to include moral and civic issues, as well as the problems of everyday human life. Future employability has become an issue in the education of teenagers. These changes are accompanied by greater flexibility for teachers and increased responsibilities for principals and schools.

The framework of the curriculum remains tightly regulated by central government, but there are more choices for teachers and principals within this framework than in the past. The Czechs are also looking for ways of increasing the role of local communities in school management.

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THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

The middle years of schooling in Czech education are seen as the second half of "primary" education rather than, as in many countries, the first half of secondary. The two phases of primary education are from 6 to 10 and from 10 to 15, with the ninth grade a "transition class" in which students are prepared for tests that will qualify them to attend either grammar schools, vocational centers, or secondary technical schools. Some grammar schools run from an earlier stage, following a similar curriculum to the primary school, so not all pupils continue in primary schools until the age of 15.

A different structure for the first nine years is being tested on an experimental basis at 625 schools. This makes a clearer distinction between elementary school from age 6 to 11 and "comprehensive school" from age 11 to 15. The objective is to reinforce some of the changes described below, in two new and separate institutions. At the comprehensive school, the idea is that the core of the curriculum should be represented by civil and family education. This change is being piloted as part of the strategy to bring civic skills and attitudes to the center of schooling in both the early and middle years. The view is that education in these years has been much too focused on the learning of specific, disconnected facts, rather than teaching children about the world around them in a humanistic framework.

ASPECTS OF SCHOOLING

The curriculum. In 1991–1992, the government introduced a new curriculum which aimed to be both more pluralistic and more liberal. For the 6th to 8th grades (age 12–14), somewhat under half of curriculum time is allocated precisely to Czech language and literature, a foreign language, mathematics, and civil education. Nine other specified subjects must be taught, but the principal can decided how much time to allocate to each, and must also allow two lessons a week for optional subjects. This permits pupils to develop their interests in, for example, extended language education, mathematics, science, arts, or sports. This degree of freedom marks an important change. It is also applied to the preparation of pupils for further education and job-seeking in the later grades.

Within this curriculum, new syllabuses have been prepared to counter the earlier tendency towards dogma and towards factual overload. The syllabuses put more emphasis on human moral qualities, on democratic coexistence and civil life, and on values such as tolerance. Civics education has been introduced as a new subject, and environmental education has been strengthened. In the 9th grade there is also a compulsory subject called family education that covers topics such as parenthood, sex education, drug addiction, AIDS prevention, and juvenile delinquency. Religious education is an optional subject organized according to the wishes of parents and pupils.

The organization of teaching and pastoral care. Throughout primary school children remain in stable class groups of mixed ability. The number of teachers gradually increases, from one in grades 1–3, to two in grades 4–5, and generally one for each subject in grades 6 onwards. One of these teachers is assigned the role of class teacher, but the Czech system has no tradition of separate pastoral care. Everyday problems are monitored by the class teacher who can solicit help from other teachers, from the family, from an educational consultant, or from specialized centers.

All teachers in the Czech Republic must be university educated. To teach children in the 10–15 age range, teachers must qualify in two subject areas. Measures are being considered to give these teachers better practical preparation for teaching this particular level of school.

Guidance and transition. Educational consultants at the school and at educational and psychological centers are responsible for helping pupils and their parents to select a suitable type of further education and to seek employment. But to a large degree the future of 15-year-olds finishing primary school is dependent on their academic performance. Pupils have to pass through admissions procedures during which their skills are judged in relation to the course applied for. There is a combination of academic tests and interviews, which are now controlled by the uppersecondary schools themselves, pointing to an increasingly competitive environment in

which the highest-status schools are in a position to require high entry standards.

The governance and management of schools. Principals are being granted progressively more freedom in both educational and administrative matters. A proposed reform would establish school councils at individual schools, and make them a firm element in school management. The council would have representatives of parents, pupils, local government, and others, and would comment on curricula and the general aims of the school as well as approving the budget.

There is also discussion of managing schools according to a more market-oriented system, in which the Ministry of Education might no longer be the only source of funding. School choice and vouchers are also being actively discussed.

Contact with families. In the past, there was a distinct separation of school from parents, whose involvement in school life was predominantly restricted to formal participation in Parents' Associations, which had a highly limited role. Now there are efforts to involve families and communities more actively in the life of the school, through school councils and by other means. Attempts to engage parents in this way are not always easy, but are part of the broader attempt to re-create a functioning "civil society." In the Czech context the new orientation towards families is particularly significant since it corresponds with curriculum change that tries to give education more of a civil, social dimension rather than seeing it as a technical exercise in the transfer of knowledge.

FURTHER READING

J Kalous et al, 1993: Analysa soucasneho stavo naseho skolstvi (Analysis of current situation within the education system). Prague: Institute of the Development of Education, Faculty of Education, Charles University.

Ramcovy program transformace ceskeho skolstvi (Program of Czech Education Reform) 1993. Prague: Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports.

THE MIDDLE YEARS IN THE DANISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

Denmark has a highly distinctive system of compulsory education based on a single school for 7- to 16-year-olds: the *Folkeskole*. This school provides a protective, caring environment for children well into their teens. Small schools, small classes, and a system of teachers following pupils throughout their time at the school all contribute to a friendly atmosphere and a nurturing ethos that does not require a large amount of professional counseling.

The Folkeskole structure has evolved from an earlier system that divided pupils into ability-based tracks at the age of 12. Between 1958 and 1994 tracking was progressively phased out; as of this year all schools are fully comprehensive from the age of 6 to 16. This history has caused the "lower-secondary" years (11–16) to be regarded as effectively an extension of elementary school. It has also given extra significance to the common national curriculum laid down by Parliament, which ensures that all children study the same main subjects.

The ethos of Danish education, influenced by 19th century philosophers such as Grundtvig, is to relate schooling to community and family life and to the personal needs of the individual pupil. Teachers get to know each child well, and are required to have regular contact with their families.

This model of schooling does not make a special case of the middle years, but articulates them well with the elementary level. Subject specialization of teachers develops progressively during the compulsory school years rather than being introduced suddenly on transition to the secondary phase. The im-

portant transition point comes at age 16, and during the preceding three years attention is given to preparing for this transition. To some extent the pain of transition is delayed to this point, and some vocational upper-secondary schools have 30 percent dropout rates. But the Danes remain convinced that their system works well.

THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

Traditionally, Danish children were divided into two groups at the age of 12. Half went to the "middle school" preparing for exams at the age of 16, and half went to a two-year "practical middle school" before leaving education altogether. These tracks were in fact located at the same school, which was also the elementary school. The exception was in rural areas, where children in the academic track were sent to towns for middle school. The introduction of a comprehensive structure from 1958 onwards aimed initially to give equal opportunities to children in rural areas. Initially this just meant encouraging schools to delay tracking. Later, tracking was reduced to certain subjects, and in legislation implemented in August 1994, it was abolished entirely. The result is that all 7- to 16-year-olds in Denmark are now educated together in a common Folkeskole following a common curriculum. These schools also have a preschool year and an optional 10th year.

It is interesting to note that all the main political parties voted for this end to tracking, which would have been controversial in a number of other European countries. One reason for this is a high degree of confidence in the ability of the teacher to give children individual attention. In fact, pupil-teacher ratios are lower than in any other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country for which figures are available (see OECD, *Education at a Glance*, Paris 1993); average class size is around 19. The size of school is also small: an average of 300 pupils spread over eleven grades (including preschool and 10th grade).

The modern Folkeskole inherits strong traditions of Danish education formulated by N.F.S. Grundtvig and others in the nineteenth century. In the context of a farming society, Grundtvig wanted schools to ad-

dress everyday life rather than become detached academies. Although this philosphy has been most directly taken up by some of the private schools (funded mainly by public vouchers) that educate 10 percent of Danish children, the tradition of public schools is also to see education as a holistic process rather than as narrowly-focused instruction. This is illustrated by the first (of three) stated aims of schools as defined by the 1993 Act on Folkeskole.

> The Folkeskole shall—in cooperation with the parents—further the pupils' acquisition of knowledge, skills, working methods and ways of expressing themeselves and thus contribute to the all-round personal development of the individual pupil.

ASPECTS OF THE FOLKESKOLE

The curriculum. In the fourth to seventh grades (ages 10–14), the following subjects are compulsory: Danish, mathematics, physical education, Christian studies, history, and English. Science is compulsory until the 6th grade and biology, geography, and physics/chemistry thereafter. Art and music are compulsory until the 5th and 6th grades respectively. Needlework, wood/metalwork, and home economics must be offered in one or more grades from 4th to 7th. Pupils are offered German as an optional second foreign language from the 7th grade, and in some schools are also offered French as an alternative. Otherwise, there are no optional subjects before the 8th grade.

Although these subject specifications are rigorously laid down by legislation, and guidelines for the content of teaching are issued by the Minister of Education, it is important to stress that decisions about materials and teaching methods are made locally by principals, teachers, parents, and pupils.

The legislation also refers to three other topics that must be taught in school: (1) traffic safety, (2) health and sex education and family knowledge, and (3) educational, vocational, and labor market orientation.

Finally, it is interesting to note that it is required that the timetable include a weekly period of free class discussion in every grade. One function of this period is to give pupils a role in making joint decisions with teachers about the content and method of learning, as they are entitled to do by law.

▲ 20

The organization of teaching and of pastoral care. Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of Danish schooling is the "vertical" organization of teaching. This means that both the "class teacher" and specific subject teachers remain with the same groups of pupils as they pass through the Folkeskole. This is considered to be a great advantage, as it allows teachers to get to know individual children and their needs extremely well.

The system works with a hybrid of subject specialism and multisubject teachers. In the first grade (age 7) each class has typically two to three teachers, each teaching more than one subject. This number gradually increases to perhaps half a dozen during the middle-school years. But there is not a sudden break, like in some countries, between a single-teacher model and subject specialization.

The class teacher, who usually also teaches Danish, has prime responsibility for the pupil's welfare. This helps reduce reliance on professional counselors. However, one teacher in each school spends about half his or her time in a counseling role, largely advising other teachers on how to deal with problems. This counseling by ordinary teachers seems to deal adequately with most problems, although there is some discussion at present about whether counseling should become more professionalized.

The teacher training system in Denmark is designed to qualify teachers at every grade of the Folkeskole, and in more than one subject. In theory, a teacher's certificate allows every subject to be taught; in practice, most teach three or four subjects.

The governance and management of schools. The Danish school system has always been decentralized, with decisions on the content of learning being made at a local level. This autonomy has recently been emphasised by further decentralization from the Ministry of Education to local authorities and from local authorities to individual schools. At the same time, there have been efforts to strengthen the influence of parents and pupils in the day to day running of schools. Each school has its own board of between five and seven elected parent representatives, plus two pupils, two teachers, and the principal. These boards have been given considerable influence over

all matters of running the schools, but one of their prime objectives is to enhance cooperation between school and home.

Contact with families. The Danish Folkeskole is required to help promote each individual pupil's personal and social development, and to help them become more mature and self-reliant. This is considered to be impossible without an ongoing dialogue between teachers, parents, and pupils.

The law is unambiguous on this point. Pupils and parents must be informed regularly about how each pupil is profiting from school. This means that information about personal, social, and academic development must be reported at least twice a year. Before the eighth grade, however, this can be done verbally rather than in written form. Frequent informal contact between parents and schools, with the participation of the pupils, are strongly encouraged.

Orientation, guidance, and transition to further study and work. Educational and vocational guidance becomes a compulsory topic in the 7th grade (age 14)— three years before the transition to upper-secondary school, to which some 90 percent of each age-group continue to study a vocational line of their choice or a general academic program. The aim of guidance at this stage is to make pupils aware of their own capabilities and options in relation to the further education and employment opportunities available. However, there is no specific time allocated to guidance, most of which is contained in the weekly discussion with the class teacher.

FURTHER READING

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Ministry of Education, Copenhagen, briefing papers, which are continuously revised from one year to the next:
— "The Folkeskole."
— "The Training of Teachers for the Folkeskole."

THE MIDDLE YEARS IN THE ENGLISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

The structure of English compulsory education has been dominated by the distinction between the primary and the secondary school, each with its own culture and traditions. Most children spend their early adolescence in schools with an age range 11–16 or 11–18, whose ethos and character are more often influenced by academic objectives for 16- and 18-year-olds than by the developmental needs of 12- or 13-year-olds.

An exception to this rule has been the introduction of middle schools in some local education systems. A wave of restructuring from the late 1960s created a situation where by 1983, 22 percent of 11-year-olds were in schools with an age-range of 8–12 or 9–13. But middle schools never managed to shake off convincingly the primary-secondary distinction, and for the past decade they have been in decline.

A number of recent reforms in the English school system have a bearing on the middle years. The introduction of a national curriculum with tests at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16 reinforce the 11-year-old break, but potentially create some new coherence to an 11–14 stage. The training of teachers on-site rather than in colleges might make some student-teachers more sensitive to the needs of this age-group. An opening up of schooling to external influence could potentially improve links between the early adolescent's experiences inside and outside school. However, the reforms have not adopted any specific approach to the needs of children during the middle years.

It is worth noting one well-established model of middle schooling — in the English private system.

"Preparatory" schools prepare boys for the elite "public" (i.e., private) schools, from ages 7 to 13. However, far from developing a model unique to the needs of early adolescence, prep schools mimic "public" schools and their classical model of academic education. As their name implies, prep schools exist to prepare pupils for what follows.

THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

Middle schools in England were born of administrative convenience, justified with educational reasoning that was never fully followed through, and declined when administrative pressures started to pull in the opposite direction. Until 1964 when a law was passed to the contrary, English local education authorities were legally obliged to make 11 the age of transition from primary to secondary school. But the restructuring of secondary education from the 1960s onwards created a good administrative rationale for middle schools. As the division of children by ability into "grammar" and "secondary modern" schools was abolished (in most areas) in favor of "comprehensive" schools, it became difficult to find buildings adequate to cater for all 11- to 18-year-olds; middle schools made more efficient use of existing buildings.

In the same period, a prominent educational justification was provided by the Plowden Report (1967) on secondary education, which suggested that a delay in the start of fully-fledged secondary education

Numbers of pupils attending English middle schools (thousands)

TYPE OF SCHOOL	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	%DROP, 1980–90
Middle, age 8–12	10	200	237	167	150	34
Middle, age 9–13	37	207	267	239	186	30
All primary, secondary and middle	6,644	8,384	8,076	7,066	6,596	18

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was likely to be good for children's development. The idea of the "developmental" advantages of middle schooling was extended beyond the mere prolonging of primary education, by writers who saw it as a "new departure" or as a "zone of transition."

However, this distinctiveness was not consistently developed in practice. It was not helped by the lack of either a teacher training or even an administrative/funding structure particular to the middle school. All middle schools are "deemed" either primary (if they cater for age 8–12) or "secondary" (age 9–13) for funding purposes. There are tendencies for middle schools to adopt the ethos of the school that they are "deemed" as, but also to duplicate divisions between primary and secondary levels within the school at different ages, with groups of teachers assigned to each year tending to adopt either primary or secondary styles.

This lack of distinctiveness contributed to a lack of support for middle schools now that administrative convenience points to their decline: with pupil numbers falling, their closure is a convenient method of rationalization. A handful of local authorities continue to stick to a full middle-school structure, but a continuing decline in numbers looks probable.

The curriculum. The 1988 Educational Reform Act created for the first time a national curriculum for all 5- to 16-year-olds in Britain. This is intended to ensure that all children receive a grounding in the main subjects, with tests at "key stages" (age 7, 11, 14, and 16) to ensure that they have done so. The ages 11 to 14 can be seen as a coherent period of education, leading up to "Key Stage 3."

The common curriculum at this stage is potentially broader than at any other, as modern languages are not included at primary school, and 14- to 16-year-olds are to get greater choice of subjects. A recent review of the curriculum (the Dearing Report) warned against "curriculum overload," but still recommended eleven compulsory subjects for the 11- to 14-year-olds, taking up roughly 80 percent of all teaching time:

SUBJECT	HOURS PER YEAR
English, Maths, Science ("core subjects")	90 each
Foreign language ("foundation subject")	65
History, Geography, Technology, Art, Music, Physical Education ("foundation subject")	45 each
Religious education	45

"The curriculum at Key Stage 3," said the Dearing Report,

> . . . must ensure that pupils have access to a broad range of subject knowledge, understanding and skills but allow for the flexibility of approach which is needed if teachers are to motivate their pupils in different ways. Principles of breadth, access and entitlement are particularly important if pupils are to make informed choices at Key Stage 4.

Behind this statement are two fundamental dilemmas, neither fully resolved. One is how to achieve breadth without overcrowding the curriculum. A dimension of the curriculum particularly relevant to young adolescents is the pursuit of five cross-subject themes: career education and guidance, citizenship, economic and industrial understanding, health education, and environmental education. But many teachers feel that demanding subject-based requirements have so far squeezed out such themes. Secondly, there is a need to balance learning objectives at any particular stage with preparation for a later stage. The statement quoted above is an indicator of the continuing tendency to define objectives in the early years of English secondary school in relation to what comes later.

Finally, the Dearing Report singled out information technology as a subject for particular attention at Key Stage 3. This agrees with the view that would see the acquisition of basic skills that aid further learning as the prime objective of the curriculum in the early secondary years.

The organization of teaching and of pastoral care. Like in many countries, schoolchildren in England move directly from primary schools in which most of their time is spent with a single teacher to secondary schools in which most of their time is spent with different subject specialists. This sharp change at age 11 can occur within middle schools too: a report by inspectors found that in schools for 9- to 13-year-olds, only 12.5 percent of children in their second year, but 64.6 percent of children in their third year, had mainly subject-specific classes (HMI 1983). The indications are that in this respect 11- to 13-year-olds in middle schools have similar experiences, on average, to their secondary-school contemporaries.

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In primary schools, the class teacher is effectively responsible for pastoral care. In secondary schools, children normally have a home "tutor" with whom they register each day. There is a diversity of practice on how sessions relating to pastoral and social issues are handled: sometimes by the tutor during the registration period, sometimes by the tutor in separate lessons, sometimes by specialist staff in separate lessons and sometimes through a combination of these methods.

One of the few common features distinctive to middle schools is the practice of year-group organization of staff, a form of team teaching. This is an alternative to subject faculties, in schools that inevitably have less subject-based competence than secondary schools, and has the advantage of giving coherence to academic, pastoral, and social development within a year-group. The disadvantage appears to be felt in terms of continuity of curriculum from one year to the next. Moreover, year-group organization helps to perpetuate the biggest cultural barrier to the development of a middle-school ethos—the continuing professional division between "primary school teachers" and "secondary school teachers."

The lack of specific teacher training for the middle years could, potentially, be counterbalanced in the future by initial teacher training which is more firmly rooted in the school. The system is being reformed to reduce to a minimum the amount of time spent in colleges and to maximize the classroom experience of student teachers. Off-site teacher training has underemphasized the needs of the middle years; perhaps classroom observation could do better by focusing directly on the needs of children at various ages. The flip side of this coin is that a teacher with little theoretical understanding of child development may not be best equipped to analyze the needs of pupils entering adolescence.

The governance and management of schools. The devolution of responsibilities to the school level is strengthening the potential for each school to formulate a distinctive mission. The majority of school budgets are now controlled at site level, and school governing bodies have a major say in every aspect of

school life. At the same time, the advisory services of local education authorities have been reduced in favor of a centrally-governed inspection procedure that invites failing schools to produce their own action plans for improvement. At best, this allows people at site level to formulate improvement in terms of an appreciation of individual needs. It might be possible to envisage schools restructuring, for example into smaller more manageable "houses," as has happened in some cases in the United States. But it is too early to identify any strong trends.

Orientation, guidance, and transition to further study and work. Career guidance is supposed to be a theme running across the curriculum from the beginning of primary school. There is little sign that this has yet led to a major departure from the tendency for career education to be concentrated in the two years before the school leaving age at 16. But the proposed creation of greater options from age 14, in terms of subject specialisms and the academic-vocational balance of studies, is likely to put greater pressure on 13-year-olds to consider the future actively. An initiative by the Department of Employment to strengthen guidance for 13- and 14-year-olds through the external careers service raises another thorny issue: the degree to which orientation and guidance is integrated into school life and the degree to which it is an "extra" activity. A principle of the national curriculum, yet to be fully realized, is that there should be a strong element of the former.

Contact with families and business. The growing influence of "outsiders" in English schools at every level is widely agreed to be producing a more balanced set of experiences. Parent and business involvement in particular has led to an increase in project work based in the community. This creates the opportunity for more rounded development of children in the middle years. However, it should be noted that while partnerships with employers tend to start earlier in Britain than in many other European countries, often involving classroom projects with participants from industry, specific vocational preparation tends to start later. This may not be a bad thing — the British believe that the acquisition of general skills rather than career-influencing choices are most appropriate in the early secondary years. But it makes "orientation" towards possible future careers a tentative business at this age.

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THE MIDDLE YEARS IN THE FRENCH SCHOOL SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

For the past 17 years France has had an institution that wants to be a middle school but cannot seem to help being a lower-secondary school. The *collège* is a common school for 11- to 15-year-olds that aims to provide a distinctive education for this age group while orienting them towards intelligent choices on entering the various types of *lycée* (senior high school). In practice, the *collège* has been accused of excessively mimicking the *lycée*, and of underserving children with educational difficulties. A major reform to tackle these deficiencies is now being prepared.

Having replaced a system of tracking of 11-year-olds according to ability, the *collège* is based on the principle that a common curriculum is a better way of preparing young teenagers for life in society than a system of separation. But rather than devising a comprehensive new approach to teaching and learning, the *collège* has borrowed most of its methods and curriculum subjects from the general (academic) *lycée*. This creates difficulties for the less academically inclined, exacerbated by the lack of special training of teachers to deal with the particular problems of this age group. Despite calls for change, teaching remains didactic in style, and mainly confined within the boundaries of traditional subjects. The *collège* is intended to be a place of constructive orientation, but this too often consists mainly of tracking its graduates into different kinds of *lycée* according to their level of academic attainment.

The proposed reform of the *collège*, scheduled for late 1994 and 1995, concentrates on giving greater

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support to children in difficulties, especially on entry to the school. It also offers more options such as Latin and Greek to brighter children, thus reintroducing some of the differentiation abolished in the 1970s. It is hard to predict the effect of these changes; a danger is that they will do little to adapt the underlying approach to teaching in the *collège* to the needs of children of this age.

THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

Like many European countries, France has a tradition of tracking secondary school children into "academic," "technical" and "vocational" studies. Until the 1960s, 11-year-olds went to different secondary schools, of different level and duration; from 1963 they all went to the same lower-secondary institution, but remained in separate tracks that predetermined their educational futures. A law passed in 1975 and implemented in 1977 (the loi Haby) created the single collège for 11- to 15-year-olds, with a common curriculum and mixed-ability classes.

One important influence on the *collège* has been the fact that full-time education beyond the age of 15 has recently become almost universal. The *lycée*, once an institution for the few, must now cater for everyone, but does so by taking three different forms, each with a different status: the academic, the technical, and the vocational high schools. In effect, selection has been postponed from 11 to 15, but awareness of this selection, mainly according to the criterion of academic achievement, has a pervasive influence on the *collège* itself.

Earlier this year, the Minister of Education announced a school reform package, which has major implications for the *collège*. The aim is to give every student a means to succeed educationally and to put particular emphasis on helping those in difficulty. The *collège* will now consist of three cycles. The 6th grade (11- to 12-year-olds) will be a consolidation year, in which knowledge acquired at primary school will be reviewed and work in small groups will ideally give individual attention to students with problems. The 5th and 4th grades (age 12–14: the French count their grades backwards) will introduce new educational options. The 3rd grade

(age 14–15) will become a period of specialized preparation for general, technical, or vocational high school study. These reforms are scheduled to be in place by fall 1995.

ASPECTS OF SCHOOLING

A 1993 report by the Ministry of Education's inspectors summarized the strengths and weaknesses of the collège as follows:

Strengths

▲ A "human scale" (average size is about 500);
▲ Normally well-equipped materially;
▲ Generally enough teachers at present, but vulnerable to change;
▲ Students mainly have an attitude conducive to learning;
▲ Teachers mainly competent in their subject, and open to alternative instructional methods.

Weaknesses

▲ The teaching force is not always well equipped to deal with a highly heterogeneous student body, including some students from very disadvantaged backgrounds;
▲ A lack of certain non-teaching staff such as counselors and social workers can hinder the wider social functions of the school;
▲ The lack of a coherent mission for most schools, whose objectives tend to be disjointed rather than "holistic";
▲ The failure of staff to work as a school team.

The inspectors recognized, as have other commentators, that the *collège* has noble ambitions, in particular to modernize teaching methods. But they also noted a lack of boldness among teachers when it comes to deviating from traditional practices. A lecturing style of teaching, imitating that of the *lycée*, remains the most common mode.

The curriculum. The structure of study in the *collège* is very similar to that in the general *lycée*, based on the traditional academic subjects. This reflects the fact that when the common *collège* was

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set up, the *lycée* was the dominant model of general secondary education, and there was no serious attempt to break with "encyclopaedism," the French tradition of teaching detailed knowledge across a range of subjects. Although there are scattered attempts at interdisciplinary or team teaching, most teaching is highly compartmentalized within the confines of the subject and the classroom. The ultimate objective of passing subject exams at the baccalaureat at the end of high school reinforces this tendency.

Proposed changes to the curriculum would make teaching more individualized and also strengthen some less academic themes, most notably civic education. This is to involve knowledge about the judicial, economic, and social systems and about European institutions and human rights. The other main change will be to introduce options from the fifth grade, including Latin and extra study in experimental science or technically-oriented subjects. This attempt at some differentiation actually reflects an original intention of the *loi Haby*, which was more or less forgotten.

The attempt to "humanize" the curriculum reflects the long-standing aim of the *collège* to educate the whole person. "*Education*" in French actually means "bringing up" a child, as opposed to the narrower term "*enseignement*," which means instruction. But as the inspectors noted in 1993, *éducation* in the *collège* has too often been seen as an extra-curricular supplement to *enseignement*—e.g., after-school clubs, foreign trips—with limited involvement of teachers and questionable learning content.

The organization of teaching and of pastoral care. French children now experience a sharp break between primary school, when there is one teacher for almost all subjects, and the *collège*, when there is one teacher per subject. The break has not always been so sharp: teachers of two subjects used to be commonplace in the *collège*, but stress on mastery of the subject during a limited-length training period caused that practice to die out.

Each class has a subject teacher responsible for its welfare, but there are not regular periods set aside in the timetable to discuss problems. It is possible to

have class discussions on non-academic themes on special occasions outside school hours. The class teacher meets roughly three times a year with the pupil's parents, and is responsible for discussing any problems with other teachers.

There is no special training for *collège* teachers. In secondary education the important distinction is between those who get an ordinary certificate and those who get the prestigious *aggrégation*. The latter qualification is needed for certain high-status jobs in the *lycée*. So the *collège* teacher has a qualification equivalent to that of a lower-status *lycée* teacher: not a particularly distinguished situation.

Orientation, guidance, and transition to further study and work. As in many countries, the links between middle schools and both elementary schools and high schools in France are often said to be inadequate. A high rate of repetition of grades in the *collège*—roughly 10 percent per grade—is seen as a sign of inadequate preparation in elementary schools. Student problems at the *lycée* are partly blamed on ill-informed choices.

The reforms mentioned above are attempting to address both problems through more individualized help on entry to the *collège* and more opportunities to specialize and hence explore one's preferences. The tendency to leave *orientation* to the final grade is being corrected. A more fundamental problem might be harder to put right: the tendency of orientation to be little more in reality than selection according to academic merit. As long as the general, "academic" studies at *lycée* have a status that makes them most people's first choice, a sorting by prefer-

ence and aptitude rather than by academic ability will be difficult to achieve. Another problem, according to the inspectors, is that there are relatively few guidance counselors, and the interviews that they have with children are not well coordinated with the everyday work of teachers.

Contact with families and businesses. French schools have historically been relatively closed to outsiders. There is a new policy commitment to open them up to communities, which is slowly having some effect, although changing the professional culture is a slow process. Perhaps the most interesting links have been ones with local businesses, geared towards employment and career issues. Linkages between schools and businesses, which initially were most common in the case of the vocational high schools, have started to catch on at the *collège* level too. There is an explicit link made between this desire to open up to outsiders and to make school less narrowly academic, and hence easier to cope with for some of the children who have been having problems.

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THE MIDDLE YEARS IN THE ITALIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

Italian compulsory education is divided into two separate stages: elementary school for ages 6 to 10, and middle school for 11 to 14. At 14, which is still the legal school leaving age, most Italian children enter senior high school, choosing one of a wide array of technical and general study programs.

The present structure was created in 1962 to replace a selective system under which an élite middle school had been a barrier to social mobility for all but the privileged. The building of a comprehensive middle school against strong opposition from conservative forces has created an emphasis on equal access to a common curriculum. By retaining almost all Italian children in this common institution until the age of 14 (dropout has fallen), the middle school has achieved its primary objective.

However, it is widely acknowledged that there are a number of problems with the Italian middle school. While it provides a common curriculum, it gives little extra support to those who have difficulty coping with their studies. The middle school remains focused on preparation for academic study, and neglects social and psychological needs. Its teachers are trained primarily in the subjects they teach, rather than in cognitive or psychological development. Perhaps most worrying of all, there are poor links between middle school and either elementary or senior high school. A significant number of children have to repeat the first year of middle school because they are underprepared. Students are given little orientation or guidance before passing on to one of the complex array upper-secondary schools, from which many drop out early.

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GENERAL TRENDS IN THE ITALIAN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Before 1962, Italian lower-secondary education was divided into two main branches: vocational training school and "lower middle school." To continue studying beyond the age of 14, it was necessary to attend the latter. Access to this school was highly selective (only 15 percent of children attended) and generally open only to children from privileged families.

The reformed, comprehensive middle school was therefore intended not just to restructure education but to achieve cultural homogenization in a traditionally layered society: the principle of equal opportunity was a radical one in this context. The most important feature of the middle school is therefore a curriculum common to all including a very wide range of subjects. The number of children attending middle school rose from 1.8 million to 2.8 million between 1965 and 1980, attributed in large part to a progressively stricter application of school compulsion by the public authorities. Since 1980, the figure has dropped to 2.2 million, but mainly because of falling birth-rates. By the early 1980s dropout from middle school had fallen to about 4 percent. Moreover, the vast majority of children leave middle school with the leaving certificate, as only a small number fail the final exam. Another positive trend in Italian middle schools is the favorable ratio of teachers to pupils—about 1 to 20 (although like most things in Italy, this varies greatly between regions and between urban and rural areas).

ASPECTS OF THE ITALIAN MIDDLE SCHOOL

The curriculum. The following compulsory subjects are taught to all middle-school pupils (numbers represent hours per week):

YEAR	ITALIAN	HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY	MATH	SCIENCE	FOREIGN LANGUAGE	ART	PHYSICAL EDUCATION	RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
I	6	4	3	2	2	2	2	1
II	9	4	3	2	3	2	2	1
III	5	4	3	3	3	2	2	1

In addition:

▲ *Latin* is compulsory in the second year and is attached to Italian; it is optional in the third year, as a separate subject.
▲ *Technology* and *Music* are both compulsory in the first year but optional in the second and third.

Except for a few, very experimental schools, such subjects as civic education, health education, and sex education are almost completely absent. This reflects the "academic" orientation of the curriculum; even where these subjects are taught they are usually considered extracurricular and run by external agencies.

The organization of teaching. Middle schools' organization is more similar to that of senior high school than to elementary school. The traditional role of the single class teacher is actually being abandoned even at elementary school level: children there are taught be several teachers specializing in groups of similar disciplines. By middle school the specialized teacher model is firmly established.

The organization of this school system seems to be designed to lead pupils to learning clear-cut, well-defined knowledge, skills, and competences, rather than to enable teachers to understand particular problems and developmental needs of individuals. Extra support is available, in the form of supplementary teachers in the classroom, for handicapped children, but not on the whole for underachievers. There is at present a lively discussion about the possibility of introducing special after-school assistance for children with problems.

One contributing factor to the lack of focus on child development rather than the transmission of a predetermined curriculum is the nature of the teaching profession. University courses do not train teachers; they simply give a specific cultural grounding based in specific subjects. As a result, most teachers working in secondary schools have no real competence or experience in developmental psychology, adolescents' problems, or instructional methods. To some extent they are not truly motivated to deal with young people. In-service training does not improve this situation much.

The governance and management of schools. The day-to-day management of teaching within the schools is entrusted to the board of teachers that, through periodic meetings, coordinates instructional activities, programs the main school objectives, monitors results, and evaluates pupil performance. However, the administrative structure of Italian middle schools is in reality strongly centralized and hierarchical, with policy decisions handed down from Minister of Education to local Director of Education to school principal to teacher. Yet despite central planning, there are remarkable discrepancies between the quality of education and infrastructure in different parts of the country. There are serious problems of dilapidated buildings, shortage of classrooms, and overcrowded schools, especially in the south. Also, the mainly female teaching force feels underpaid and undervalued.

Orientation, guidance, and transition to further study and work. An important purpose of the middle school is in principle to prepare pupils for senior high school, orienting them towards appropriate courses of study with regard to their possible career futures. Yet the function of orientation is still far from being firmly established. The few centers for vocational guidance and school orientation are for the most part external to the schools and not well integrated into school life. There is a lack of supplementary specialized staff within schools, such as career officers, psychologists, and social workers.

Lack of orientation contributes to a high dropout rate in senior high school: while only around 15 percent leave school at 14, the total participation rate in high school education is about 60 percent of the relevant age-group, lower than any other OECD country except Turkey (OECD, 1992, *Education at a Glance*). A key problem with the present system is that, in the name of equality, there is virtually no variation in the curriculum for different pupils up to the age of 14, yet a wide range of options from that age onwards. This means that important choices must be made before students have had an opportunity to sample learning options beyond the common core. A reform currently being considered by Parliament in conjuction with a raising of the school leaving age would create a less specialized, more

unified curriculum for the first two years of senior high school.

An OECD review of Italian education in the 1980s found that there were weak connections not only between middle and senior high schools, but also between elementary and middle schools (OECD, 1985). A significant indicator is the number of children who have to repeat the first year of middle school, because they have not entered at the required standard. Despite attempts to reduce it. this repeating rate has remained at around 10 percent.

Contact with families. In 1975 an attempt was made to enhance constructive participation of pupils and parents in school life, by giving them representation on the board of teachers and the school council. But many of the elected representatives were acting for the main political parties, and brought partisan disputes rather than a principle of cooperation into the schools. Within a few years these non-teaching representatives had lost much of their legitimacy. Today they still exist on a formal basis, but they do not have any real power in taking decisions.

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THE MIDDLE YEARS IN THE DUTCH SCHOOL SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

When they leave elementary education at age 12, Dutch children are divided into four secondary school types. These tracks largely predetermine childrens' futures, in terms of the amount of time that they will remain in education and the balance between vocational and academic studies at each stage. The "lowest" track introduces a strongly vocational orientation into the middle years of schooling and for the majority leads to apprenticeships or the job market at the age of 16. The highest track is heavily academic and leads to university. The two middle tracks prepare pupils for higher vocational studies at high school or college level.

In an attempt to modernize this system, the Netherlands has recently introduced not a comprehensive school, but a common curriculum for pupils aged 12 to 15. The aim is to ensure that all children reach a basic level of attainment in the middle years, although there is scope for more advanced pupils to reach this level more quickly than others. By deciding to retain the four tracks, the Dutch have maintained the principle of separating young adolescents into different groups according to ability, while attempting to ensure a common standard in these years. Some would question however whether a common curriculum can be effectively implemented without a common school.

Although Dutch education is firmly structured, it presents on the whole a friendly face to its users: relatively small schools have strong roots in local communities based on religion and neighborhood.

The relative stability of Dutch society has helped to ensure that a high proportion of young adolescents find themselves on well-trodden pathways — whether on routes to higher academic study or to well-defined trades. But in a decreasingly certain world, measures to provide good guidance and information about the labor market have recently become much more explicit, and are integrated into the new common curriculum.

THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

On the advice of the elementary school and on the basis of test results, each Dutch 12-year-old is sent to the secondary school that corresponds to his or her ability. The four types are:

- ▲ VWO, or *pre-university* education;
- ▲ HAVO, or *higher-general* education;
- ▲ MAVO, or *lower-general* education;
- ▲ VBO, or *pre-vocational* education.

Although an increasing number of institutions cater to more than one of these types, pupils are nevertheless taught completely separately within them, except in some cases in a mixed-ability class during the first year.

Pre-university education lasts six years ending in a university entrance exam. Higher-general education lasts five years and potentially gives access to four years of vocational study at a higher education institution. Lower general education lasts four years and is typically followed by two to four years of high school vocational education. Pre-vocational education lasts four years and leads to the labor market, apprenticeships or in some cases high school vocational education. These are not the only routes—it is possible to move "sideways" into a different stream—but are the main patterns. The system effectively delays vocational education longer for successively higher ability groups, and produces a workforce that is stratified according to the length of preparation.

This system was introduced in 1968 and aimed to tailor different kinds of schooling to the needs of different kinds of pupil. Two long-term trends subsequently created the need for further reform. One was a rise in aspirations and a consequent decline in demand for the pre-vocational track — until recently called "lower-vocational" — as a preparation for particular manual trades. The renaming of this track is part of an effort to reform it into a more desirable option. But high dropout and high unemployment even for those who complete this track remain serious problems. Moreover, this lowest track is increasingly becoming a ghetto for children of immigrants, particularly from Turkey and Morocco, who are virtually absent in the higher tracks and whose families and teachers often have low expectations of them.

The second trend has been the growth of the notion among politicians and public that a common basic education needs to continue beyond the age of twelve. The introduction of optional subjects in the post-1968 system was perceived as having permitted the lower two tracks to maintain low standards in terms of mainstream academic achievement. The introduction of a "transition" year from age 12–13, theoretically producing equal chances by giving pupils the opportunity to change their track, has in practice functioned more as an introduction to the particular track and thus accentuated differences. A 1991 OECD review of Dutch education identified lower secondary education as the "weak link" in the Dutch system, citing evidence that it "reinforces social inequality."

Like in Germany, the idea arose in the 1970s of creating a comprehensive school. A socialist administration set up 20 pilot comprehensive "middle" schools, but the succeeding conservative government did not pursue this venture. After many more years of deliberation and debate, the alternative concept of a common curriculum for 12- to 15-year-olds ("Basic Education") was finally accepted by Parliament in 1992, and implemented from autumn 1993.

The curriculum. Basic education is compulsory for pupils in all four types of lower-secondary school. It contains fifteen mandatory subjects, covering about 80 percent of school time: Dutch, English, French/German, math, biology, physics, chemistry, information literacy, history and civics, geography, economics, technology, social and life skills, two fine arts subjects, and physical education.

Matters like health and sex education are taught under social and life skills. Although not much time is allocated to this subject — 100 hours over the three years, compared to 400 for Dutch and math, and 360 for physical education in the recommended timetable — its introduction was an innovation much debated in Parliament. In a fairly conservative educational environment it required considerable lobbying to get social and life skills taken seriously as a curriculum subject; technology, by contrast, was adopted as a new subject without much debate.

The curriculum has two particularly significant new features. The first is an attempt to make it more than a disconnected list of subject coverage, by introducing a coherent framework with three main goals: pupils should be taught how to *apply* what they learn; pupils should acquire *competences* that are relevant for their future lives; and pupils should gain an insight into the *coherence* between subjects and disciplines. The second distinctive feature is flexibility in the time it takes to complete the curriculum, in relation to tested attainment targets. Thus, it is possible for schools to take two or four years rather than three years to complete basic education, depending on the ability of their pupils and on the degree to which they aim to teach other (e.g., vocational) subjects during the same period.

The organization of teaching and of pastoral care. There is a sharp change for pupils coming from elementary schools with class teachers to secondary education where teachers are subject specialists. Subjects are combined under a single teacher only on a small scale.

Almost all Dutch schools assign teachers special responsibilities for each class of pupils (who remain

together for all subjects). A mentor acts as a counselor for a class. A "decaan" is a careers counselor/teacher who helps pupils to make decisions about subject options and further schooling. Many schools offer pupils the chance to spend extra time on help with homework and with specific learning difficulties. It should be added that the small average size of secondary schools — under 700 pupils, often divided into more than one section — helps make them friendly places, in some respects more similar to elementary than secondary schools in a country like the United States.

Teacher training for lower-secondary education is distinct from upper-secondary. This divide serves mainly to focus subject training on the curriculum of this stage rather than necessarily to address particular psychological needs of young adolescents.

The governance and management of schools. Nearly three-quarters of Dutch secondary pupils attend schools that are privately owned and governed (90 percent of them by religious foundations), even though publicly funded and regulated. This system has always given schools a strong sense of identity, shared by the pupils who have chosen them for religious or other reasons. It does not however give schools autonomy in all the areas that an outsider might expect. Resources are tightly managed by central government and while schools organize the deployment of teachers, the content of education is to a large extent determined by attainment targets and tests at the end of basic education.

Orientation, guidance, and transition to further study and work. Orientation is not only the responsibility of the "decaan" referred to above. The new law on basic education states for the first time that each subject teacher must explain how the curriculum relates to further study and work. A more sophisticated approach is being taken to career information, with analysis of the outlook for particular fields of work or study being produced at the national level.

Contact with families and business. Partnerships with parents are less strong than at primary level but are nevertheless important, especially in the religious schools. At a formal level, every secondary school must have an advisory "participation council" of staff, pupils and parents. In practice, the greatest strength is drawn from the rooting of the school in community life, especially in small towns where the secondary school can be one of the biggest cultural and social driving forces as well as one of the biggest employers. Links with other employers are popular, but tend to be concentrated on vocational schools rather than relating to general education.

FURTHER READING

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GERMANY AND SWITZERLAND: ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE THE TRANSITION TO SELECTIVE SECONDARY EDUCATION

OVERVIEW

Germany and Switzerland both divide children early into secondary schools corresponding to different abilities. These systems have not faced major challenges as they are considered to work well in steering pupils towards appropriate destinations via apprenticeships or higher education. However, pressures on the systems have been created by rising aspirations (which deplete demand for the least prestigious options) and by a growing reluctance to see children as young as ten having their futures foreclosed.

Both Germany and Switzerland are federal countries; the most important educational decisions are made at the state level (the *Land* and the canton respectively). This precludes any nationwide reform to secondary education systems. In both countries however there is a common trend, more pronounced in some places than in others, to make the system more flexible and more permeable—with greater movement between different educational streams than in the past. One important attempt to open the system up has been the introduction in a few states of "orientation" stages at the beginning of secondary education. In general the aim has been to make the transition to segregated secondary education a gradual and explorative process rather than a sudden break.

This section briefly outlines the secondary school systems in Germany and in Switzerland, and in each country describes an example of a state that has introduced an orientation stage in the middle years. These examples are in no way representative of the

two countries—they are more exceptional than typical—but illustrate interesting and relatively radical attempts at reform in generally conservative education systems.

GERMANY: THE SYSTEM

After a four-year elementary school, German schoolchildren at the age of ten go mainly to one of three types of secondary school: the *Hauptschule*, the *Realschule*, or the *Gymnasium*. Although all three schools follow a general academic curriculum, the Hauptschule leads mainly to apprenticeships after five years, the Realschule mainly to full-time vocational education or apprenticeships after six years, and the Gymnasium mainly to university after nine years. Some states have introduced a comprehensive school alternative running alongside the tripartite system, but this is nowhere the dominant model.

The biggest current problem with this system is that fewer and fewer families wish to send their children to the Hauptschule. This was once seen as a respectable route to a trade via apprenticeship, but has become increasingly stigmatized. Between 1960 and 1990 the proportion of 12- to 15-year-olds in Hauptschule fell from 64 percent to 34 percent. One kind of problem that this creates results from the fact that parents can enroll their child in any kind of school, regardless of the elementary school's recommendation of what the child can cope with. Children who then fail grades must repeat them or transfer to a different school. On average some 40 percent of children now fail at least one grade at secondary school.

The German system has become less rigid over the years, particularly at the upper-secondary level and beyond, in terms of movement between various forms of higher education, vocational education and apprenticeship as students develop their interests and abilities. But lower down the system transfer is too often a negative process based on failure. Three states—Lower Saxony, Hessen, and the city-state of Bremen—have responded by keeping all children together in the first two years of secondary school, when they are "oriented" towards appropriate tracks. Lower Saxony's "orientation level" is generally regarded as the best developed.

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INNOVATION: LOWER SAXONY'S ORIENTIERUNGSSTUFFE

The large North German state of Lower Saxony has introduced a two-year orientation level (*Orientierungsstuffe*, or "OS") in which 5th and 6th graders are all taught together and the choice of secondary school type is delayed until the age of 12.

This stage does more than just postpone selection: it allows pupils a chance to explore their abilities and particular strengths. Although the majority of teaching is in mixed-ability groups, a form of trial tracking in some German, math, and English classes allows pupils to try out harder and easier courses. Moreover within OS, the teaching styles of the three modes of secondary education are reproduced, to give pupils an idea of what these modes involve. One advantage of bringing all children together is considered to be the scope for "social learning"—the more gifted pupils serving as an example for others.

This level of education provides a useful transition between elementary and secondary teaching modes. About a third of lessons are conducted by a "class teacher" who is normally the German teacher but has enough time also to offer general guidance to his or her pupils. This teacher works jointly with the 4–6 other subject teachers in producing a recommendation about which school the child should go to after the 6th grade.

The success of OS is measured by the fact that around 80 percent of pupils subsequently pass through secondary education without failing a grade—only half the average failure rate of other states. Thus OS is a useful transitionary mechanism to make Germany's segregated secondary school system work more smoothly. But its characteristics are determined by that system rather than by any separate analysis of child development in the "middle years." This is illustrated by the fact that OS teaching staff are trained as Hauptschule, Realschule, or Gymnasium teachers. Their job is to give pupils a taste of those three systems, not to devise something distinctive in itself.

SWITZERLAND: THE SYSTEM

Few generalizations can safely be made about education in Switzerland, where the principle of local autonomy has enjoyed cult status since 1291. In a country of 6 million people, 26 cantons each make their

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own education laws, which are administered by some 3,000 communes.

In different cantons, primary school lasting 4, 5, or 6 years is followed by lower-secondary schools lasting until the 9th or 10th grade; pupils then divide into up to five types of upper-secondary education including a strong apprenticeship system. At lower-secondary level, there is a division into 2, 3, or 4 sections, either in completely separate schools or in schools that combine the sections.

Behind this complicated picture, some current trends can be identified. One is towards the "co-operative" model of combining different lower-secondary schools sections in a single institution, with increased permeability between the sections. Typically classes in basic subjects are streamed but optional classes are open to all. There is also a trend towards having just two sections—elementary and advanced. Thus aspects of comprehensive schooling are being introduced, but no comprehensive school as such has outlived the experimental stage.

This type of change, though ad hoc, responds to various perceived weaknesses in Swiss lower-secondary education. Central to these is the concern that the system has not allowed students enough mobility. Many teachers and parents oppose moves towards a comprehensive model for fear that it will mean "leveling down." But an OECD review of Swiss education concluded that:

> . . . cantons that have opted for a more comprehensive type of orientation cycle see it as a way of developing the pupil's personality, capacity for mobilization and the quality of the choices made. The involvement of pupils, parents and teachers in this orientation is a guarantee of dynamism . . . and probably of a general raising of the average level of what is learned, even if it means that the best are sometimes hampered in expressing themselves, which is not evident. (OECD 1991, page 78)

INNOVATION: THE CYCLE D'ORIENTATION IN THE CANTON OF VALAIS

Situated in the heart of the Alps, the canton of Valais has adopted a forward-looking education policy to respond to new service and high-tech oportunities in the region. As a central part of educational reform it has introduced a period of "orientation" in which all 7th to 9th graders (ages 12–15) are educated in the

same school while their abilities and interests are assessed. This reform postpones rigid tracking, creating a more open structure by allowing students to make individual choices about subjects studied and to progress at their own pace.

Communes are given the choice between integrated classes with tracking in core academic subjects, or division into two sections. Students have opportunities to complete this cycle in two, three or four years according to ability, and are able to choose various optional subjects from the third year. Some interesting aspects of this innovation, adopted in 1986, include:

▲ An attempt to move from general tests of student intelligence to more comprehensive assessments of individuals, including various personality traits and specific aptitudes;

▲ Strong recognition of the parental role in the orientation process;

▲ A greater role for teachers as all-round educators rather than merely transmitters of knowledge;

▲ Special support for children having difficulty keeping up with the curriculum;

▲ A conscious balance between core academic subjects and more general educative themes like civic education and cultural studies as well as early career guidance.

This key stage of education, concludes a report by the canton, has the delicate mission of "progressively and positively orienting students according to their interests, knowledge and aptitudes . . . It must favor a pedagogy of success." (CDIP 1989, volume 2)

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Copies of this publication are available from:

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